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Stress and Coping in Elite Slalom Canoeists Prior to Major Competition

Faye F. Didymus, Ian M. Raspin, David Fletcher, and Rachel Arnold

Objectives: The primary objective of this study was to investigate the stressor-coping associations experienced by elite slalom canoeists prior to major competition.

Design: An exploratory, qualitative approach was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate because they allowed the interviewer to guide the participants toward the issues being investigated whilst providing the participants with an opportunity to talk openly about their experiences.

Methods: Following institutional ethical approval, ten elite slalom canoeists ($M_{\text{age}} = 27.6$ years, $SD = 3.87$ years) were interviewed. Succeeding transcription, the data were analysed using inductive and deductive content analyses.

Results: The results reveal that the participants experienced a variety of organizational and competitive stressors in the period prior to major competition. The prominent organizational stressors were “expectations,” which was predominantly managed using problem solving, accommodation, and self-reliance coping behaviors; “maintaining relationships with significant others,” which was most often managed using problem solving coping strategies; and “unclear event timings,” which was typically managed using accommodation coping behaviors. The main competitive stressor was “highly technical moves,” which was most often managed using self-reliance coping behaviors.

Conclusions: To conclude, organizational and competitive stressors placed a significant demand on the participants in the period prior to major international competition. Some coping strategies appear to be used in response to a single stressor whereas other coping strategies are consistently employed in response to a variety of stressors. Stressor-coping associations appear to be highly complex processes that can provide a guide for the development of effective stress management interventions.